

The Historical Trends of Reading Instruction in the Twentieth Century

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jill C. Miels, Ph.D.", is written over a horizontal line.

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## Purpose of Thesis

This discussion of the trends of reading instruction in twentieth century elementary schools is broken into five time periods, based on the periods described by Nila Banton Smith in her book, American Reading Instruction (1965). Research has been examined to determine the characteristic methods and trends of each time period, according to experts of the time and of contemporary experts. The basic teaching methods and the primary philosophies and theories will be discussed with an emphasis on word recognition skills, comprehension skills, and reading styles. Following the presentation of the research findings, there will be a section of recommendations for the future teaching of reading in elementary schools.

Teaching a child how to read has traditionally been thought of as one of the primary goals of an elementary school. Without the ability to read, a child will have a tremendous amount of difficulty functioning in society. Over the years, the question has been raised, however, about the most effective way to teach reading in the primary grades. Research seems to advocate one methodology for a period of time, just to have a new theory or ideology replace the old ideas. The cyclical structure of the historical trends of reading instruction make it difficult for teachers to be certain of the “correct” or even the “most popular” method of teaching reading, but studying the trends may give clues to where reading instruction will be headed in the future. As with other things, it is important to know where we have been to realize where we are going.

This paper will follow and describe the major trends and issues brought forth in American reading instruction in elementary schools from 1910 to today. Broken down into five sections, research will be examined from each of the time periods of the Twentieth Century, as described by Nila Banton Smith in her book, American Reading Instruction (1965).

### **The Education System Prior to 1910**

Schools have been a facet of America since the first colonists came to this land to settle, away from Europe’s religious or political rule. Before the War of Independence, the only known method of instruction included, according to Mathews (1966), “the ancient classical method of having the child start with a mastery of letters, then of syllables, and finally of words and sentences” (p. 27). Instructional materials in use mainly included the hornbook, a paddle-shaped piece of wood or other material that contained the alphabet and other important information, and the Bible. Books of

religious psalms, called Psalter, were also used often, indicating the amount of religious content that was emphasized in schools at the time. After the Revolutionary War, nationalistic content dominated the instructional materials used in schools. Noah Webster published spellers aimed at purifying the language to unify the new country (Robinson, 1977, p. 46). Religious themes were still commonly used in the reading materials and an emphasis on elocution dominated most instruction until the 1840's. The word method of teaching vocabulary became utilized after the 1840's and Horace Mann tried to reform instruction to allow students to use their learned skills in meaningful situations. This method continued to be popular into the early 1900's, along with an emphasis on good oral reading skills. McGuffey, as well as others, developed series of readers, giving teachers more instructional materials and methods. Graded schools were developed around the turn of the century, giving more white, rich males the opportunity to attend school (Robinson, 1977, p. 48).

### **1910 to 1925—A great break-through in reading instruction**

The “first truly great break-through in American reading instruction” came about in the period beginning with 1910 and continuing up to, but not including, 1925 (Smith, 1965, p. 157). In this era of instruction, there was a new emphasis on silent reading, reading speed, and reading difficulties, along with many new theories never before encountered in the education field. Many of these new ideas came about from two major movements or philosophies that were apparent during this time. The progressive movement and the scientific movement added new research and practices to a system of teaching reading that had previously focused only on the appreciation of literature

(Smith, 1965, p. 196). These two movements, along with social issues of this time period, added a great deal to American reading instruction.

Between the years of 1910-1925, the scientific movement was influencing the world of education. This movement had made its first impact on the world in the 1700's and the 1800's with the significant blossoming of ideas and theories in science. The scientific movement in education occurred much later and was characterized by an outpouring of data collected about how children learn most effectively. In 1910, one of the scientific movement's greatest advocates, Edward Lee Thorndyke, published a handwriting scale that is often recognized as the beginning of the "contemporary movement for measuring educational products scientifically" (Smith, 1965, p. 157). Thorndyke recognized the possibility of establishing education as a science that could be measured and was "convinced that quantitative measurement was the most powerful tool at his disposal" (Monaghan, 1987, p. 96). Reading researchers all over the country were gathering as much scientific data as possible to determine the most effective way to teach not only reading, but also other content areas like language arts, math, and science. Researchers created tests, scales, and charts based on their new research and quantitative data that would not only simplify, but also correct the teaching of reading in the schools.

One example of the new scientific studies, scales, and tests was Thorndyke's word lists. He studied the speech of young children and calculated the frequency of the words spoken. He concluded that the words young children learn to speak first and use most frequently should be the words that they learn to read first. Soon after Thorndyke's word lists were published, William Gray came out with *The Gray Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs* in 1915 (Robinson, 1977, p. 50). Gray and Thorndyke's work paved

the way for other researchers to publish standardized tests and scales, based on scientific data. Standardized tests were developed to collect data about effective reading and reading instruction. The data collected during this period led to more new methods and practices than in any other prior period in the history of education.

The second major philosophy at work during the period of 1910 to 1925 was the progressive movement. Best represented by the Cook County Normal School in Chicago, progressive education focused on the experiences of the child while he or she learned the material or curriculum. The progressives, led by John Dewey, believed that learning through valuable experiences was the most effective method of learning and the school's mission should be to provide as many meaningful experiences as possible. The students in a progressive environment were given freedom to make choices about their learning with the help of the teacher, who served as the moderator of learning. The curriculum was determined by the interests of the students while group learning and problem solving were areas that were emphasized.

Reading instruction in progressive schools followed these same ideas. Colonel Francis Parker, who served as the principal of Cook County Normal School said "literacy instruction in this context proceeded from the students' interests. Children created their own stories, which were then printed up as 'Reading Leaflets' and used instead of textbooks for reading instruction" (Monaghan, 1987, p. 96). Language Experience Approach was utilized and was often the most structured reading activity. The progressive schools presented reading as a casual affair and encouraged that students begin reading later rather than sooner in their academic career because reading was often seen as secondary to the child's overall project or activity. The value of the learning

experience was seen in the overall product and if the student happened to learn about reading in the process, that was wonderful. Reading was not, however, the main focus of the progressives curriculum. Vocabulary was presented with a whole word method, but only as the students needed the word. Instead of teaching the child how to break down the word into its different parts, the progressives advocated teaching the child the entire word. Once the child memorized the word, he would be able to recognize it in the future and be able to read it effectively. The progressive movement helped push the teaching of reading into the new century because many new theories and ideas were presented and used.

There was one main social reason that America was exposed to so many new ideas between the years of 1910 and 1925. It became obvious during the United State's involvement in World War I that the education system needed to be re-examined. The United States was involved in this World War between 1917 and 1918. During this time, the Army administered the Alpha Test to American soldiers in an attempt to assess their silent reading skills. It was discovered that thousands of American soldiers could not read adequately enough to follow printed instructions related to their training or orders. Responding to this outrage, educators, newspapers, and educational periodicals called for the reformation of the education system (Smith, 1965, p. 158). The reading system was under scrutiny and experts and educators needed to make the necessary changes to better educate the young Americans in the school systems.

Because of the scientific and progressive movements in education, along with World War I, several new methods of teaching reading were evident at this time. There was a change from oral reading in class to a push for silent reading on an individual basis

between 1918 and 1925. There was an increased demand for reading for meaning during this time period that would aid students in meeting the varied needs of society (Robinson, 1977, p. 50). “Intelligent silent reading” (Roser, 1984, p. 55), as identified by William Gray, was advocated by progressive teachers who thought of reading “as a means of extending experience and of stimulating the thinking power of boys and girls” (Roser, 1984, p.55). Gray also stated in the Eighteenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (1919) that silent reading was more efficient and more worthwhile than oral reading was at the time (Smith, 1965, p. 162). Dr. Edmund Huey had the following to say about silent reading in a professional book published in 1908:

“Reading as a school exercise has almost always been thought of as reading aloud, in spite of the obvious fact that reading in actual life is to be mainly silent reading. The consequent attention to reading as an exercise in speaking, and it has usually been a rather bad exercise in speaking at that, has been heavily at the expense of reading as the art of thought-getting and thought-manipulating” (Smith, 1965, p. 160).

Because of this focus on silent reading, teachers could actually teach reading without speaking in class. Printed instructions were often given to the students. The teacher could assess comprehension of the material if the students could correctly complete the action described in the instructions (Gray, 1963, p. 52). Focusing on reading silently was considered by many of the top educators to be the most effective method of teaching reading at the time.

Reading researchers advocated silent reading because the scientific studies seemed to prove that it supported superior comprehension skills and reading rates than oral reading exercises. According to separate studies conducted by Mead, Oberholtzer, Pintner and Gilliland, Schmidt and Judd, silent reading proved to be more effective in



terms of speed and comprehension. Both aspects of reading seemed to be faster and more worthwhile when a student read a passage silently (Smith, 1965, p. 160). In 1922, Ernest Horn of the University of Iowa gave his opinion of silent reading.

He said there was "...common agreement today that more care should be taken to insure proper comprehension in the reading exercises in the primary grades. This inevitably leads to an increase of emphasis upon silent reading, since in oral reading it is impossible to tell with any degree of accuracy whether or not the pupil understands what he has read" (Monaghan, 1977, p. 357)

This new emphasis on silent reading supported the progressive ideas that children should understand what they are doing and complete activities at their own rate. Children were able to take as long as they liked to read a passage to ensure proper comprehension. Silent reading was advocated by the experts as the most effective and worthwhile way to teach reading comprehension.

One advocate for silent reading instruction was William Gray. In 1917 he made several suggestions related to the instruction of reading comprehension. Many of his suggestions still guide reading researchers today. According to Robinson (1990), he suggested that "a student's prior knowledge that he/she will be responsible for understanding the material improves the quality of reading" (p. 69) and that "emphasis on those elements upon which meaning depends improves comprehension" (p. 69). Elements that Gray saw as important include topic sentences, modifying phrases, related words, and written reproductions of the material read. Gray also suggested that "fast readers are usually better comprehenders than slow readers" (Robinson, 1990, p. 69), but pushing a student to read too quickly may harm the comprehension of the passage. Gray's examination of comprehension led to many reforms during this time period.

Comprehension was not the only aspect of reading that was affected by the scientific and progressive movements. Teaching students skills that would aid in their reading abilities also became an issue during this period. Instruction became a series of skills that were taught in a sequenced way. The expected result was mature reading. The idea of skills as applied to the early twentieth century means the use and application of literacy, as well as the tools necessary to be a literate human being (Templeton, 1991, p. 591). This teaching skills in a sequenced manner was a result of the surge of data and research that came with the scientific movement. The new skills were arranged to fit into a sequence and were often found in the new teacher's editions and manuals that appeared during this time. These skills brought a new purpose for learning reading; literacy skills should be developed for use in the everyday world, not just in the classroom. Reading for meaning became important in this changing society.

The period between 1910 and 1925 saw many changes come about as a result of the progressive and scientific movements. Reading experts like Edward Lee Thorndyke and William Gray helped educators see the need for silent reading in the classroom and for standardized testing as a way to collect and study data about students and methods. Measurement of reading and reading methods found a place in this period as many new studies, tests, and scales were developed. Reading instruction took a huge step forward in the battle to provide the most meaningful and worthwhile instruction possible.

### **1925 to 1935 – An period of extensions and applications of research**

The second period of American reading instruction in the Twentieth Century spans the years of 1925 to 1935. Smith (1965) has identified this period as a period of continued and intensive applications of research done in the previous period (p. 196).

There was a continuation of the research and investigations that were being conducted in the previous period. In addition to this new emphasis on expanding research, there were two prominent teaching philosophies. One idea focused on teaching reading by teaching sequential skills in a carefully planned out program coordinated by an adult, while the second was centered around the child, allowing the child to “carry out his own purposes, meeting and solving attendant problems within the context of his own experiences and needs” (Smith, 1965, p. 197). This idea, also known as the Activity Movement, became popular during this period, but the method of teaching reading from the basal reader was the prominent ideology of this time period.

The textbook approach was the main focus of reading instruction at this time. The proponents of this method continued to use the basal readers as the main tool to teach reading. The basal materials, books, and methods began to look at broader objectives than had been looked at in the previous years. There was a greater range of broad reading goals instead of the previous idea of just a few specific goals. In contrast to instruction aimed at the development of a few skills, the broader objectives focused “toward the development of several different abilities needed in the various purposes for which reading was used in well-rounded living” (Smith, 1965, p. 198). Attention was also given to reading methods that helped stimulate children’s thinking abilities, enrich their tastes, and extend the reading experience. The expectation was that readers should be able to intelligently participate in society and be able to fully appreciate a wide range of activities. Educators at this time tried to promote a positive attitude toward reading for a wide range of purposes (Smith, 1965, p.204-5). Aims such as these were the main focus at this time in reading history.

Along with the new, broader emphasis on reading goals, reading experts were extending and applying the research previously written about different aspects of reading and reading instruction. One research study examined the different purposes for reading, both in schools and in everyday life. Adults and children were found to have different habits and interests while reading. This resulted in a call for a more varied approach in regard to materials and methods necessary to reach all individuals, regardless of their ability levels. The varied nature of adult life called for a more diverse method of teaching reading; the main goal was to, by exposing children to a variety of methods and purposes for reading, prepare children for the different experiences they would experience in their present and future lives. Because of the abundance of research on this topic, it was very instrumental in bringing about an emphasis on a broader reading program. The wider goals made it possible to reach every student regardless of his or her individual needs.

Another topic that researchers once again examined at great length was the issue of silent reading. In the previous time period, silent reading was the most popular type of reading because it most closely mirrored the way children would use reading as adults. Combining the study of silent reading with the examination of reading purposes, research studies were conducted with more than 900 adults concerning their uses for reading in their lives. Silent reading was proven to be the most popular way to read, but several reasons for oral reading were uncovered. The most popular uses for oral reading included to inform or entertain others, to increase appreciation of a piece of literature, and to entertain or interest children in reading (Smith, 1965, pp.199-200). Contrary to the previous period, both silent and oral reading were recognized as worthwhile

activities. There was shown to be a place for each in school and in society. Smith (1965) reports that oral reading was mainly used in the primary grades before students had learned many words, while use of silent reading was advocated in the upper grades so the students could read rapidly (p. 239). Both approaches to reading were accepted during the years of 1925 to 1935.

Reading instruction during this period, with exception of the advocates of the Activity Movement, focused around the basal reading program. One innovation of this time was the pre-primer. Authors of basal readers felt that students needed more preparation before working at the primer level of the series. Pre-primer books followed the same format of the primers, with less vocabulary and more repetition to help the students learn basic sight words. The subject matter in the pre-primer closely resembled the rest of the books in the series. Realistic stories were found most often, but poetry, old folk tales, informational material, and silent reading exercises were also found in the basal series written at this time. Smith (1965) reported that almost 84 per cent of the stories in the basal reading series were realistic narratives (p. 219). This shows the lack of variety in the basals of the period.

Teachers using the basal readers during this time were encouraged to integrate the reading skills and methods with other subject areas in the classroom. The teacher's manuals of basal readers suggested activities like making and reading charts based on the experiences of the students, making newspapers of their own, and making use of reading in connection with other areas of work in the classroom (Smith, 1965, p.230). Teachers were encouraged to teach reading skills throughout the day, instead of only during a designated reading period. The teacher's manual of the pre-primer stage appeared to

have more opportunities for integration while the suggestions lessened as the student progressed into higher grades. However, data was showing that integration between subject areas was a worthwhile strategy. Robinson (1990) cited Jacobsen who, while working with ninth grade science students in 1933, said that “giving reading instruction in the field in which the content is to be mastered is superior to giving it in another subject matter field and expecting the ability to transfer to a content field”(p. 85). Even though integration was advocated as worthwhile by experts and some teachers moved toward an integrated approach, most teachers were only able to correlate their activities. Correlation focused on looking for reading through other content areas because reading was not the central core of the educational program (Robinson, 1977, p.52-3). Educators were advocating integration and making the attempt to merge reading with the other content areas.

Besides the efforts to integrate reading into other areas of the curriculum, several other methods were popular during these years. Teaching all subject areas around a theme was popular, as were language experience charts and writing based on the children's experiences. Children were also taught to read by getting involved in dramatics, reproducing stories, reading charts, and learning rhymes. Research into writing instruction showed that writing skills were best developed in the context of meaningful writing, similar to how reading was best developed in the context of meaningful reading (Templeton, 1991, p. 592). This resulted in reading and writing done in real contexts centered around meaningful activities.

In addition to the integrated approach and the use of these types of methods, teachers were teaching phonics as a method of decoding unknown words. Many teachers

were convinced that phonics should be done away with, but basal authors were not under the same impression. There was varying confidence in the value of phonics at this time, but there were also many different methods of teaching phonics available to teachers. Students were taught different sound elements and then generalize that sound into other words, instead of a sound being taught in complete isolation. Types of ear and eye training were also procedures used, in an attempt to recognize similarities and differences of sound elements. Decoding sounds was not the only phonics strategy taught at this time. Smith (1965) stated that “children are frequently given training in finding out words through context clues as well as attacking them phonetically” (p. 235). A method of intrinsic phonics, developed by Dr. Gates, instructed the students to recognize similarities and differences in word elements through comprehension of the words (Gates, 1935, p. 280). The word attack program, another option in phonics instruction, helped children associate sounds and meaning with the printed form of the words in their speaking vocabulary. This method focused on associating a meaning with the word that was sounded out (Smith, 1965, 234). Different methods of teaching decoding skills helped teachers match the students with the skills that would best match his or her needs as a reader.

Accompanying the practice of teaching the phonics skills that were necessary to the individual child was the growing emphasis on ability grouping. Because of the great amount of research concerning differences in individuals, changes were made in the organization and management of the classroom. The grouping of students was advocated as the best way to meet the individual needs of students. Students were grouped on not only their intelligence, but also on reading interests, social background, physical

condition, emotional maturity, and the results of reading tests. Three groups were often created to help students of different abilities, but these groups could be flexible, allowing students to move according to their achievement. Smith (1965) has quoted Gates as saying that, when using basal readers with different ability groups, “it should be adjusted to individual needs and that each child should be encouraged to move on into wider and more advanced material as rapidly as possible” (p. 240). This change in reading instruction was designed to help all students reach their potential as a student.

Another innovation of this period was tied to the concept of ability grouping. There are always some students who do not achieve as rapidly as others. Teaching these students to read, sometimes known as remedial reading, was a primary subject of research during this period. Gates said the following in 1935:

“Remedial instruction, as the phrase implies, is designed to improve abilities in which diagnosis has revealed deficiencies. Such teaching is intended to correct demonstrated weakness or to remove inappropriate habits. It emphasizes administering to individual needs since a type of instruction seriously needed by one pupil may be disadvantageous to another” (p. 25).

One theory concerning the reasons some students needed remedial instruction was created by Samuel T. Orton. He developed the theory of cerebral dominance, which ties reading problems with left or mixed laterality. He connected the idea of left or mixed handedness, eyedness, and footedness with some reading problems (Smith, 1965, p. 257). This popular theory provided one explanation for different reading difficulties seen in students and the needs of those students. Remedial instruction in classrooms was designed around these different needs of individual students. One method of remedial teaching was the kinesthetic method, developed by Dr. Grace M. Fernald. The kinesthetic method began with the child tracing a written word using his or her fingers.



While tracing, the child said the word in parts. Following that portion, the child could reproduce the word without looking at the original. Finally, the word could be used in writing a story or sentence (Smith, 1965, p. 258). This, along with many other remedial techniques and methods, helped students having difficulty learning how to read.

Remedial reading was just one method that was popular during this time period to help children learn to read. Another method, aimed at younger students, was targeted to help prepare students to learn to read. In 1926 the International Kindergarten Union, along with the United States Bureau of Education, conducted a study of teachers concerning students' readiness to learn reading skills upon entering first grade (Gray, 1963, p. 53). This movement advocated the teaching of reading in first grade, based solely on the fact that a student is legally entitled to enter school at age six and therefore should be able and prepared to learn to read. Smith (1965) described a study conducted in 1927 by Reed in which results showed that 1 out of every 6 students failed the first semester of first grade while 1 student in 8 failed the second semester of first grade (p. 261). Reading readiness finally gained recognition in school practice after having grown in force during the previous period. As a result of research, a readiness program involved building a background of literacy skills that were seen as essential to students learning how to read. Visual and auditory discrimination exercises, along with alphabet and vocabulary practice, formed the typical readiness program. Through this program, experts were convinced that students would become better readers because they were being given an appropriate background for literacy behaviors.

These practices were utilized by teachers who advocated the use of the textbook and the coordinating materials. The second philosophy that was popular during the years

of 1925 to 1935 was the Activity Movement. Growing out of the philosophies of Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Dewey, and Kilpatrick, the Activity Movement centered around the child and his or her interests and abilities. These theories were put to use in Dewey's laboratory school at the University of Chicago and at the Francis W. Parker School of Chicago. According to Smith (1965), reading was taught "largely as it entered into or flowed out of children's interests, problems, and activities" (p. 243). Materials were prepared by the teacher and the students and the basal readers were discarded or kept in the classroom as an additional resource or storybook. Because the Activity Movement was centered around each child, individual differences were accounted for and each child was allowed to make decisions about his or her own learning. The teacher set broad goals for the entire class, but each child basically learned at his own pace, satisfying his or her own interests and curiosities.

There were several problems in implementing and using the Activity Approach in elementary classrooms. One was the difficulty in finding different materials and books focused around one subject that spanned different ability levels. These types of resources were necessary because thematic work was often conducted. The entire class would often be working on projects centered around a common theme or topic. A variety of materials was necessary to make thematic work a successful experience. A second difficulty in using this approach was that new materials were constantly needed in order to create a well-rounded experience. These materials were not always readily available and teachers had a hard time developing or gathering a variety of things. Another obstacle in using the Activity Movement approach came with uninformed teachers.

Many teachers were using the theories and methods from the movement, but did not fully

understand the entire process. This resulted in classrooms that claimed to be activity-based, but were lacking in several areas. The Activity Movement had difficulty in its application because there was not a great deal of writing conducted about the subject. The Activity Movement, although popular during this time period, did not continue much longer into the century.

The years between 1925 and 1935 saw an expansion of research and investigations conducted in the previous period. Research provided information on two different philosophies; the textbook method and the Activity Movement. The textbook method, using the basal reading series, focused on broad goals for literacy learning while the Activity Movement focus on the child and his or her interests and abilities, instead of using a set curriculum such as a basal reader. Reading research provided different programs like reading readiness and remedial reading to help account for the individual differences in students. This period was known for broadening the perspectives of the earlier research.

### **1935 to 1950 – The effects of international conflict on reading instruction**

Between the years of 1935 and 1950, the entire world was in a state of deep turmoil. Smith (1965) described these years as the period of international conflict (p. 266). The world went to war during this time, with World War II lasting from 1939 to 1945. The United States became involved in 1941 and helped bring about the peace treaty after the surrenders of Germany and Japan. Life in America changed drastically because of the war. Women began to work in factories and on the assembly lines, keeping the country moving so the soldiers could concentrate on fighting the war overseas. Families were torn apart and the human loss was devastating. The one thing in

America that remained constant during this time of unrest was the schools. But even though schools continued to function during World War II, they suffered along with the rest of the country. Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate substitute teachers caused by a shortage of personnel resulted in difficult times for the education system (Smith, 1965, p. 267). The amount of new research and instructional materials produced slowed down considerably, mainly because many of the educators were called away to contribute to the war effort. The academic world, although still functioning, slowed down in an attempt to support the war effort.

Even though World War II had grave effects on the education system during the years of U.S. involvement, it bounced back and resumed its position in society when the war finally ended. One positive effect the war had on education was realized after a few years. Smith (1965) states that “another effect of world-wide tension and strife was that it caused a few forethinkers to state a fresh viewpoint in regard to the contribution which reading might make to the American democracy” (p. 267). Using reading as a tool to build a stronger democracy was being examined after the end of the war. The United States was obsessed with promoting democracy throughout the country and in the world. Being able to read well was proclaimed as a tool that would aid all Americans in the crusade for a democratic society.

Once again, like World War I, Americans made the terrible rediscovery that American soldiers were still having difficulty reading instructions for camp life during the war. In response to this hardship, many soldiers were taught to read in camps and it was found that they could learn how to read with amazing results. This discovery resulted in new investigations into reading deficiencies and reading at higher levels.

Studying reading at high school and college levels became important and there soon were several more publications related to this new series of research and investigation (Smith, p. 269).

Studying the methods of high school and college reading were not the only effects of the realization of the reading deficiencies in soldiers. Because so many young people were having difficulty reading, there was a “general tightening up of informal procedures for teaching reading, and a renewed emphasis on systematic reading instruction” (Smith, 1965, p. 270). Reading was no longer taught only in relation to special projects or individual interests, as was advocated by the progressives. Reading was realized as an essential skill that was necessary to the efficient and advancing America. Research ceased to advocate reading as a supplementary activity to aid the activity approach to progressive education. It was decided by the academic society that a systematic approach was more effective in teaching essential reading skills than the previous opportunistic methods (Smith, 1965, p. 271). Because of these factors, a major shift in reading methodology and theory occurred.

A second reason the academic world decided on a more structured approach to reading occurred with the invention of the radio and motion pictures. With these two technological innovations, reading received its first major threat. Between the years of 1938 to 1950, radio “replaced the lamp on the living room table of practically all homes in America” (Smith, 1965, p. 271). Individuals no longer found it necessary to read to gain information. It was given to them orally through the radio. Educators and parents became concerned about the displacement of the reading materials by the radio. Comic strips and movies were also gaining popularity at this time. The visual and oral signals

the movies and radios provided gave an easier way to gain information. The information receiver did not need to decode a message from the paper; information was fed to them and, in the case of the movies, visual images were provided, lessening the need for imagination. Many experts saw the radio, movies and comics as the first real threat to reading for pleasure or for information.

Reading instruction in schools was taking a new turn during this time period. There was a trend of using child development theories in the teaching of reading. Researchers and educators began to look at the broad perspective of each child's mental, physical, emotional, and social development to decide the most effective way to meet each child's individual needs. Reading readiness programs continued to prepare young children for the task of learning to read. A variety of materials were developed for the readiness period. Typical activities included those that would provide language experiences and practice in different reading-associated skills, such as sequence, identification of letters and sounds, and matching pictures to spoken words. Basal readers began providing several readiness books at the beginning of their series during this time period. The young child, who was assumed to be unable to read, would be immersed in a world of literacy and language activities in order to prepare him or her for the task of mastering the reading process later in school. Reading readiness was seen as the solution to the problem of teaching children how to read during this period.

After children successfully completed the readiness program, they were prepared for the task of learning how to read. Basal readers, the most common tool used in elementary classrooms, began to advocate integrating reading with other subject areas. Many authors began to list language arts skills that could be tied into the stories read in

reading class. Developing reading skills within the context of the other content areas was another new idea for this time period. Stories and informational articles that contained information learned in social studies or science was used to reinforce reading and language arts skills (Robinson, 1977, p. 54). The need for teaching reading and how it related to other content areas was stressed.

Even though reading and language arts were often integrated into other subject areas, isolated reading skills were also taught. The period between the 1940's to the present as a "period of subskill proliferation" (Roser, p 56). Educators tried to isolate skills so instruction would be more effective. Long skill charts were used to indicate the specific skills or subskills that were to be developed at each grade level. Skills were often broken down, practiced, and then sometimes applied to a selection of reading material.

Along with skill instruction, vocabulary and word recognition skills were emphasized, as well. The use of context clues and structural analysis was being taught to elementary students in an effort to aid children in the decoding process. Phonics was utilized extensively, but experts encouraged teachers to delay the main focus of phonics until students started second grade. Dr. Witty stated that "the practice followed in modern schools is to delay phonic analysis of words until children have a start in reading for meaning and a stock of sight words" (Smith, 1965, p. 290-291). A big part of phonics, especially in the 1940's, was visual and auditory discrimination. These skills were introduced as an aspect of phonics in an effort to instruct children in seeing and hearing similarities and differences in letters and sounds. The visual discrimination and

auditory discrimination aspects of phonics were introduced in first grade while the main thrust of phonics was reserved for second and third grades (Smith, 1965, p. 291).

While new methods of teaching word recognition and phonics were being introduced, comprehension instruction was receiving some attention, as well. Comprehension was being segmented and broken down in a similar way to word recognition skills and phonics. There was an attempt to break down the area that had previously been thought of as comprehension into different kinds of meaning-getting processes (Smith, 1965, p. 292). In 1949, Durrell identified two general approaches that would help improve comprehension instruction in schools. The first approach was “the related activity approach which recognizes that meaning rests upon experience and that the ultimate use of reading is in enriching the activities of life” while the second approach was “the reading-skills approach which gives the child systematic practice in the basic skills needed for effective reading” (Robinson, 1990, p. 70). Durrell suggested that instructors utilize both methods of teaching reading comprehension to insure that students will be able to adapt to individual and group situations (Robinson, 1990, p. 70). Even though Durrell made these suggestions, there is little evidence to suggest that teachers took his advice. Most research studies reflected the use of drill to teach comprehension subskills. There was little direct teaching and teachers assumed that drill would result in transfer to other situations. It was a definite change from previous trends.

These new theories in comprehension and word recognition were also apparent in the basal readers that were published during this time period. New readers used real stories more often in this period than in previous years, but the versions seen in the basal readers were re-written with controlled vocabulary. Re-writes of old classic stories were



interspersed with a wide range of more realistic stories. Poetry was also seen more often than before. With the improvement of writing quality and art work, basal readers were becoming more attractive and pleasing. There was also an emphasis on changing basal readers so they modeled reading that students would encounter in the real world. After several studies on eye-movement, it was concluded that children found it difficult to fixate on a return sweep if the passage was indented on the second line instead of the first. Because children had trouble reading the passage and because educators desired to make reading class similar to real life, indentation patterns were changed from indenting the second line to indenting the first line of the paragraph (Smith, 1965, p. 279). This change was a significant difference from basal readers from previous times.

Changes in comprehension and word recognition were not the only ones seen during the years of 1935 to 1950. There was new research into the area of reading disabilities and individual differences. H. Alan Robinson (1977) said that “the first vague beginnings of special help for poor readers became visible” (p. 51). Durrell made several other suggestions for adjusting to individual needs, ranging from providing suitable materials to long-range assignments and smaller groupings of students (Smith, 1965, p. 294). Helen Robinson conducted a five year study that involved a team of reading specialists who studied and taught 30 remedial readers. One of the conclusions of the study was that “...a large proportion of children who are considered ‘unteachable’ may learn to read when adequate diagnostic and remedial steps are taken” (Smith, 1965, p. 303). The most popular way of dealing with students with individual needs was through small groups. These groups were, at times, flexible when using the basal

readers. Because of the new research, readers who needed special help were able to receive it and not labeled as “unteachable.”

The period from 1935 to 1950 was a time of great change in the world. World War II forced the country to put the interests of the nation first while other things like education took a less prominent position. The schools were able to regain their composure after the War and found ways to reach the students with different needs, as well as begin preparing young children for the task of learning to read. Phonics was emphasized in the older grades, accompanied by the emphasis on using context clues with unknown words. Research was conducted on topics like reading readiness, higher level reading, and reading problems. The education system of this period was ready to help promote democracy and the American way throughout the country and the world.

### **1950 to 1965 – A period of technological growth**

During the period from 1935 to 1950, America was involved in and then recovering from World War II. This resulted in a wide range of reading reforms coming from issues brought up during the war. From 1950 until 1965, America saw a breakthrough in the amount of technology and new information available to citizens. Smith (1965) has named this period “a time of expanding knowledge and technological revolution” (p. 308). Americans saw the need for maintaining the country’s leadership in the world and for preserving the way Americans lived everyday. Because of the new technological breakthroughs, reading instruction suddenly became gravely important to the advancement of the nation.

The Cold War, having started in the mid-1940’s, was affecting the entire world. The United States pledged to fight Communism in all forms. As a result, the U.S. found

itself in competition with the Soviet Union in a wide range of technological races. One of these contests that the United States lost was the space race on October 4, 1957. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik I to orbit the earth, beating the United States into space. The educational system of the United States felt directly threatened by the launch of Sputnik. Reading instruction came under direct criticism by educators and laymen. The U.S. woke up to the shocking realization that a vigorous effort was necessary if Americans were going to preserve the democratic way of life. Reading instruction needed to be reformed if American students were going to be able to keep up with the new types of technology that were being developed. Students also needed to be able to understand and use the new technology. Smith (1965) said that "...if children in school and adults in present day life are to keep in step with our ever-changing age they must be able to read well and with discriminating understanding in all fields of endeavor" (p. 309). Because they needed to find ways to help students keep up in this age, reading educators felt the pressure to find new methods that worked faster and better than the previous methods of teaching reading. As a result, research in this time period flourished as experts tried to find the best methods, quickly.

In an attempt to improve the education system in America, the government stepped in to help. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson both supported education and worked to start programs that would give financial support to public education. President Johnson paired his support of education with his battle against poverty. His goal was to lessen poverty by improving the public education system. During his term, he recommended legislation for new school libraries because over 70% of schools had no library. He also advocated the frequent update of textbooks so American students would

not be caught behind other country's children in regards to new knowledge. He felt that "the obsolete text can suffocate the learning process" (Smith, 1965, p. 316). President Johnson also provided additional funding to remedial reading programs and programs to improve the education of teachers. In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This legislation gave billions of dollars to remedial reading and math programs. These types of governmental legislation helped educators continue to improve the education system in America.

While the federal government was trying to improve the educational system from the outside, educators inside the system were conducting studies to determine the most effective methods of instruction. One such study, The Harvard Report on Reading in the Elementary Schools, was conducted by Austin and Morrison. They questioned 795 elementary schools from all parts of the country. After conducting extensive research, they concluded "...that no single method of instruction in beginning reading be advocated but that a variety of approaches be utilized and that these be adjusted to the competencies and needs of the individual children" (Smith, 1965, p. 353). The authors of the study found that many schools, in an attempt to revise their teaching of word recognition skills, had over-emphasized phonics instruction while neglecting other techniques. This study could not find one method of teaching reading that was more effective or more worthwhile than any other.

Although the Harvard study was ambivalent on the methods of teaching reading in elementary schools, Rudolf Flesch had an opinion of his own. In 1955 he published his book, Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It. Flesch accused all educators of ignoring the alphabet and of ignoring their own research. He spoke out

— against the whole word method of teaching vocabulary and advocated more phonics instruction in schools. Monaghan (1987) says “Flesch’s book is not only a tirade against the whole word method of teaching reading, but also an indictment of the American school system in general” (p. 106). Experts retaliated by claiming that children who learned to read with Flesch’s method would be “word callers” (Monaghan, 1987, p. 107) and would read without any comprehension of the material. Flesch’s book provided parents with a ‘how-to’ section, which included word lists that parents could use to teach their child to read. Educators continued to use the sight approach and a method Monaghan (1987) called “analytic phonics” (p. 107), which was against treating letters as just sounds in isolation. Flesch managed, however, to force the educational community to examine the methods and processes involved in teaching phonics to beginning readers.

— Partially because of Flesch’s condemnation of the whole word method of instruction, there was a great deal of research done to determine its possible benefits. Smith (1965) describes the findings of a phonics study that showed most teachers favored a program that taught sounds and letter combinations as they occurred in literature instead of a systematic approach that taught only how to sound out letters in isolation (p. 351). Most teachers, however, taught phonics before the children had developed a sight word vocabulary of 50 - 100 words. This, according to Smith (1965), was a practice that went directly against the current research, which was advocating sight word mastery prior to phonics instruction. After Flesch published his idea of phonics as a method of sounding out words and blending the sounds into words, educators were more determined to teach the sight approach which was against teaching sounds in isolation (Monaghan,

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1987, p. 107). Phonics instruction in a reading program was one of the most controversial subjects during this time period.

Phonics was not the only area of reading instruction that demanded attention. Comprehension strategies were becoming one of the most persistent problems for teachers and administrators. Smith (1965) commented on the comprehension trends during this time period by saying "Perhaps the most important improvement is to be noted in the increased amount of attention given to the study skills or those skills needed in reading in other subject fields" (p. 360). Comprehension methods and practices began to focus around how reading is used in other content areas. Critics of the programs pushed for more emphasis on development of critical reading and higher thinking skills. Appreciation for literature was often emphasized, as well. Robinson (1990) described comprehension during this time as "...a unitary process of seeking meaning from print rather than as an accumulation or hierarchy of skills" (p. 72). He cited the research as a result of the Sputnik launch as proof for this new way of assessing the reading comprehension of students. Interpretation and critical thinking became the emphasis of reading comprehension methods during this period.

Other aspects of the reading experience received some attention during this period, as well. Integration of all of the language arts was becoming a popular topic. NCTE began to advocate merging reading with writing, listening, and speaking to create a total language arts experience in 1952 (Smith, 1965, p. 362). Authors of basal readers tried to provide various types of practice in listening, speaking, and writing with the reading stories. The Sheldon Fifth-Reader Teacher's Guide commented on integration by saying "Reading, inseparable from other language processes, is best taught as part of the

whole area of language development” (Smith, 1965, p. 363). Integration of the language arts was a new, rapidly developing trend in reading instruction.

Reading readiness, a concept that began to take hold in the previous time periods, also came under attack between 1950 and 1965. The critics were more concerned with the procedures undertaken with reading readiness than with the actual concept (Robinson, 1977, p. 55). Many of the critics began to question whether the materials used in the readiness period were contributing to a child’s ability to read. The materials that were in use at the time were supposed to place emphasis on language development prior to the child’s learning how to read. A readiness book that focused on language abilities and picture cards were often used before an actual reading book was introduced. Many of the critics of the readiness process felt that readiness was “a function of total child growth” (Smith, 1965, p. 355) and they expressed doubt that the current materials in use were taking all aspects of the child’s academic readiness into account. Robinson (1977) stated that a child may know how to read while working through the readiness materials, but could be held back from his or her peers if he or she had not mastered all skills deemed necessary by the readiness program (p. 55). This fact is one reason Smith (1965) commented that “this whole area of reading readiness will probably undergo controversy and discussion during the ensuing period” (p. 356).

After students completed the readiness period, most began learning to read from a basal reader series. Authors of basal readers were trying to mold their readers to fit the current trends and research seen in this period. Integration of the language arts was one area that was once again becoming evident during this time period. Often, a basal series for one grade level had the standard reader, an enrichment reader, supplementary readers

for advanced students, and simplified versions for slower readers. This effort to support individual differences supports new research into remedial reading programs. In response to research advocating reading instruction at higher levels, basal authors began including programs designed for seventh and eighth graders, instead of cutting off instruction at sixth grade. There was a great deal of effort on the part of basal authors to make their programs a worthwhile experience for the beginning and learning reader.

Even though the authors of basal readers were making an attempt to mirror the findings of current research, they were falling short in several categories. There was a decrease in the number of new words introduced in the pre-primer and primer books. The average number of new introduced in a total pre-primer program was just 59 words; the average number of new words introduced in the primer program dropped to 89 words. This was a significant decrease from the previous editions of basal reading programs (Smith, 1965, p. 328). Another unfortunate occurrence with the utilization of the basal readers was that most teachers neglected to use the supplementary materials supplied with the readers. Smith (1965) remarked that "...it became obvious that basal readers were often misused. Many teachers apparently were unaware of the real purposes of the basal texts and frequently relied on these books as the sole tool of instruction" (p. 354). This unfortunate practice continued throughout this time period.

The period of time between the years of 1950 and 1965 saw a huge increase in the amount of technology and knowledge that children were being exposed to in their everyday lives. Reading instruction was challenged to transform itself to meet each child's changing needs. With the launch of the Sputnik satellite and the increased involvement of the government in public education, researchers and experts tried to



determine the most effective methods to continue America's prominent place in the world. With educators and laymen criticizing the methods, reading instruction changed to best meet the needs of every student.

### **1965 to 1995 – A time of change in reading instruction**

The last period of time to be examined is from 1965 to 1995. This section, along with describing the largest time span, also examines several shifts in reading instructional practices. The practices and methods of teaching reading are significantly different in 1995 than they were in 1965. According to Chall (1977), reading instruction experienced more change between 1967 and 1977 than in the preceding 50 years (p. 5). There has been a great deal of change since 1977, as well. An attempt will be made to describe these changes in a chronological order, if possible.

The improvement of literacy skills for every individual was called for during the first decade of this period. The critics of reading instruction accused educators of contributing to the “dulling of students’ abilities and creativity” (Shannon, 1990, p. 128). The education system was relying on the methods advocated in the textbooks, with little or no change to account for student differences. It was recognized that knowledge and inspiration was not going to be obtained from printed material if an individual could not read above a fourth grade level (Chall, 1977, p. 6). As a result of this realization, The National Academy of Education’s Reading Committee recommended a twelfth-grade reading level for all adults in order to enable them to make significant contributions to society. In response, the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1966, James E. Allen, announced that every individual had the “right to read.” According to Chall (1977), he said that “reading is the very life of the individual-and of the society” (p. 5). A campaign

was launched to eliminate illiteracy in the United States by 1980. This, however, became an impossible dream as a result of outside factors, in spite of the Right to Read program that was started at this time (Robinson 1977, p.56).

Besides the criticism aimed at schools and educators during the first decade of this period for not preparing students for a literate life, there were also questions about the methods utilized to account for differences in students. Shannon (1990) commented that schools “reinforced, rather than challenged, social, economic, and intellectual biases” (p. 128). This criticism resulted in an emphasis placed on helping minority students and students having problems in school. There was strong public support in teaching reading as a tool to develop the individual. Groups pushing to get back to the basics and groups like Jesse Jackson’s black youth movement called for diverse instructional methods to help account for individual differences (Chall, 1977, p. 7). Individual differences were also emphasized when norm-referenced tests came under attack. Critics felt that the tests were biased against minority or bilingual children and children who lived in families with a low socioeconomic status. Critics advocated criterion-referenced tests or mastery tests because the norm-referenced tests did not give teachers information about the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Because teacher accountability was also becoming popular, renewed emphasis was placed on helping minority students achieve in schools.

In the previous time period, reading was primarily taught in a whole word method because there was an emphasis on getting meaning from reading. During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, a change occurred and a strong emphasis on decoding became popular. The relationship between sounds and letters was taught in strong phonics programs. By

the mid-1970's, code emphasis was the most popular strategy for teaching vocabulary and decoding skills. A great deal of games, devices, and workbooks were developed to help young students learn the phonics rules of decoding words while reading. A research study that compared students in 1977 with students of 5 and 10 years before seemed to favor code emphasis over an emphasis on reading for meaning. According to Chall (1977), "all comparisons of reading achievement at grades 1,2,3, and 4 seem to indicate that the children of today are ahead of those of five and 10 years ago" (p. 12). In addition to this, however, Chall advocated teaching phonics in moderation saying, "I recommend a code emphasis only as a beginning reading method...I do not recommend ignoring reading-for-meaning practice" (Chall, 1967, pp. 307-308). Others seemed to make a call for a program based around only phonics strategies. In 1977, Robinson stated that "the cry for more phonics issued loud and clear once again as *the* way of solving 'the reading problem'" (p. 56). Several television programs even supported this phonics and decoding emphasis. Programs like Sesame Street and The Electric Company had a strong emphasis on decoding and phonics strategies. Phonics, with its emphasis on word parts and functions, became the main strategy for teaching word recognition during the beginning of this time period.

Along with the emphasis on phonics in the beginning of this period came a debate on the best way to identify comprehension and teach it in the elementary classroom. Experts saw two sides to the comprehension issue; it was seen both as a general skill in itself and as a number of specific, identifiable subskills that should be taught in sequence (Chall, 1977). Robert L. Thorndyke identified comprehension as a "unitary ability composed mainly of verbal reasoning" (Chall, 1977, p. 17) based on his

research in the United States and 14 other countries. In contrast to Thorndyke's opinion, Frederick Davis's research advocated comprehension as "composed of separate skills and abilities, such as understanding word meanings, verbal reasoning, getting the main idea, detecting... mood, and discerning word meanings in context" (Chall, 1977, p. 17). Davis's idea of identifiable skills is the theory that is most widely accepted by most educators and experts.

During the beginning of this time period, several methods became popular to teach reading comprehension. Advanced organizers and structured overviews were the subject of several research studies and were found to have made significant results in the comprehension of the read material (Robinson 1990). Teaching students how to summarize material was used as a comprehension activity. Several studies advocated the teaching of summarizing as a method of assessing comprehension. Later in the period, pre-reading activities such as semantic mapping and webbing became popular, especially with poor readers, poorly organized material, or difficult text. These activities were developing and becoming popular as a result of the emerging philosophies of whole language, which was most popular in the second half of this time period.

There was an examination of the way children learn to speak and, ultimately, how they learn to read during this time period. One line of thinking that was becoming popular was the view of the psycholinguists. Looking at the patterns of speech acquisition and applying it to reading instruction, psycholinguists showed that "children are capable, active learners under appropriate conditions. Children learn the complicated rules of spoken language through hypothesis and testing of rules, rather than systematically through reinforcement" (Shannon 1990, p. 133). Sharing many ideas with

the progressives, psycholinguists believed that a meaningful environment must be created for children to test their ideas and determine the proper rules and features of language.

Along with this focus on teaching from a psycholinguistic point of view came a theory that contradicted the reading readiness concept that had been so popular. Reutzel and Cooter (1992) claim that “the reading readiness model has become theoretically and practically inadequate for studying how young children become literate” (p. 306). In response to the lessening trust in the reading readiness concept, a theory of emergent literacy came forward. Defined by Reutzel and Cooter (1992), “emergent symbolizes the view that literacy is a continuum that begins at birth and continues throughout life, and literacy embraces the abilities of both reading and writing” (p. 306). Emergent literacy became a popular theory when research determined that there was not a set chronological age that meant children were able to learn reading skills. Y. Goodman (1986), through her studies of at-risk beginning readers, found that these children knew a great deal about the uses and functions of print material. There seemed to be no reason to withhold print material from children under the age of six on the basis that they had not chronologically reached the appropriate age.

A new movement of reading practices and philosophy started growing in the late 1970's. It grew from the basis laid by the psycholinguists and the proponents of emergent literacy, as well as the progressive ideas from the early 1900's. Burns, Roe, and Ross (1992) say that “the suggestions for practices that are congruent with a psycholinguistic theory are ones that are often suggested by advocates of a whole language philosophy toward reading. These educators want students to be involved with authentic reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities...” (p. 23). Whole language,

which is more of a philosophy than a set of methods and practices, drew on the theories of John Dewey and Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, as well as contemporary experts like Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, Donald Graves, and Frank Smith. Evolving since the early 1960's, whole language emphasizes the ideas that the child is in control of his or her learning. It is not, however, a set of methods to be directly followed. According to Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores (1987), the following is true: "Whole Language is not a practice. It is a set of beliefs, a perspective... Journals, book publishing, literature study, thematic science units and so forth do not make a classroom *Whole Language*" (p. 145). These types of activities evolve into a Whole Language methodology when the teacher believes in the theories of language learning that surround the philosophy and applies them to his or her reading program. Learners are to be actively involved in their learning instead of being passive acceptors of knowledge and new information is related to the students' prior knowledge. As Yetta Goodman (1989) describes, "Whole-language educators and their predecessors believe that learners ultimately are in control of what they learn regardless of what is being taught" (p. 114). Together with the teacher, whose role is one of a collaborator and co-learner, students explore and use language in meaningful, authentic experiences instead of in contrived, artificial situations.

The Whole Language movement does not subscribe to a series of practices that are to be followed exactly. Whole Language insists that the students are immersed into a print-rich environment, which requires a great variety of reading materials. By using real literature and print materials that the students would use in their everyday lives, language and reading are seen to be useful and meaningful. All skills needed for reading are practiced in the context of the stories or books read. Cornett and Blankenship (1990) say

that “reading in the whole language classroom is not taught according to phonics, whole word, linguistic, or eclectic approaches but is taught as a means of ‘creating meaning from print’” (p. 18). Different strategies are taught and experimented with, according to the students’ needs or purposes. Instruction often takes the form of modeling, explaining, questioning, and presenting a problem (Cornett and Blankenship, 1990). Collaboration, conferencing, and cooperation are encouraged, instead of forcing children to passively sit in chairs all day.

The period spanning the years from 1965 to 1995 is the largest amount of time examined in this paper. A shift in the research and practices of reading instruction occurred. At the beginning of this time period, reading educators were focused on phonics-based, segmented instructional methods. Educators were accused of not challenging students and of not attempting to meet the needs of every student, resulting in renewed interest in individual differences. By the middle of this time period, a change occurred in the common practices of teaching reading. Looking at the research documenting the language acquisition patterns of young children, new theories about emergent literacy came about from a psycholinguistic approach. Following the emergent literacy research came the Whole Language movement, which focuses on learning language in a holistic, authentic way, in real language and literacy situations, instead of contrived, artificial ways. The Whole Language philosophy is trying to take hold in the educational practices of this decade, in an attempt to lead education into the next century.

Throughout this research paper, several trends in reading instruction have become apparent. The theories set by the Progressives at the turn of the century seem to reappear in almost every time period in this century. Child-centered, authentic experiences with

language have been recommended for many decades as the most efficient way to teach reading to elementary students. These concepts have been seen in the methodology advocated by the Progressive Movement, the Activity Movement, and the Whole Language philosophy. Even though many experts have advocated a child-centered approach, the basal reader has become a facet in every elementary classroom in America. Teachers have been using this curriculum choice throughout the entire century as the primary tool for teaching children how to read. Although current research tends to point toward a literature-based method of instruction, basal readers are continuing to be the primary source of reading material for students. This trend will be difficult to break. One positive sign for basal reading series is that many publishers are moving toward selections from real literature with more opportunities for integration across the curriculum. This is one attempt to bring the Whole Language movement into the basal reader curriculum.

A third aspect of reading instruction that has endured through the century is the concept of phonics-based strategies. Although it is not currently advocated as an effective method of teaching decoding skills, some form of phonics has been seen in the instructional practices of every decade. Other decoding methods that have been popular have included using context clues, whole-word methods, and several types of phonics strategies, like Dr. Gate's intrinsic phonics method. Most experts recommend teaching each student the method that will be the most helpful to the individual student, depending on his or her individual needs. The concept of phonics instruction will continue to be a popular discussion topic into the next century.



### **Recommendations for the Next Century**

Even though reading instruction is in constant change because of the amount of research and investigations conducted at all times, there seem to be several recurring themes that keep appearing. The concept of literature-based, authentic experiences has been popular in several decades. The current philosophy of Whole Language practices advocates using real literature instead of basal readers, teaching skills in the context that they are needed, and integrating all content areas together into a thematic study. This philosophy is advocated by many experts during this time period because it follows the research on how language is acquired by young children. Difficulties become apparent when teachers do not fully understand or embrace the theories and methods that make the Whole Language philosophy successful. Uninformed teachers find difficulty in implementing Whole Language and tend to prefer a traditional method, because of the emphasis on skills and drill and practice. Teachers and administrators of schools not subscribing to Whole Language methods should set up inservice programs and do research on their own instead of being satisfied with doing things the way they always have. The teachers who are willing to change will see that the benefits for his or her students will greatly outweigh the trouble of additional work and worry. Support groups should be formed and school administrators should provide opportunities for this change to occur.

One benefit of embracing the Whole Language philosophy is that it is not a set of methods or practices that should be followed exactly. This allows teachers an opportunity to implement and adapt their own reading program that, although based on

the theories of language acquisition and effective learning, is also based on the individual needs of the students in the classroom. This may result in the reading program used with one class consisting of different things than the reading program of the previous class. This aspect of Whole Language allows willing teachers to create the most effective, worthwhile experiences possible for the students. Teachers should be willing to make the necessary changes every year to adapt to different students.

While using real literature in authentic experiences is an appropriate practice for teaching reading, care needs to be taken that students acquire the necessary skills needed to use reading in everyday life. There are no skill worksheets to be filled out by students because skills are applied through the literature. Teachers should be aware, however, that all decoding and comprehension skills be taught. These skills can be taught with a variety of methods and should only be taught to students that need the instruction. Small groups can be taught mini-lessons to practice using important skills with literature. Teachers should not assume that skills are being taught and should be aware of the needs of each student.

In addition to being aware of the needs of students, teachers should empower students with the strategies that will benefit each student. If a student needs a structured decoding method found in a strict phonics method, then phonics strategies should be taught to the student. If a student learns decoding best by reading literature and using the context clues, then the student should be taught strategies for using the clues in the reading selection. No one strategy is best for every student; teachers should apply different methods to different students so every student is able to achieve to his or her

maximum potential, which should be the ultimate goal of every teacher and administrator.

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